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Membryonics

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Painting

Department of Art and Design

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Membrionics

Spaces act as conduits for memory, emotion and experience, and for years I have used the expression of space to communicate with my viewer on a primal level.

I thought of bodies as the autonomous, solid vessels that carried the self through the spaces that we occupy, navigating the emotional markers and events that shape our lives and identities. Through a series of illnesses and complications during my journey to have a child, my understanding of the definitions of space, body and self became much more fluid. The body, environment and self are not separate: they are intertwined, continuous. As various medical professionals literally opened my body to the world around me, so too did I understand that our selves are perpetually woven into our surroundings. These works reflect the internal physical and psychological spaces of the body and self, opening into the space around them, both carrying and pouring out emotion for the viewer to instinctually relate to. The penetrability and fragility of the body is mirrored in the disintegration of the art object. Some works remain "self contained", with interior spaces only glimpsed at, while others spill out into the viewer's environments, crossing the boundary to the outside (viewer's) space, while still others create space, inviting the viewer to enter the body, to reside within.

The body is permeable, continually receiving and expelling. The female body acts out the extremes of this state during any reproductive act. Female surface, environment, interiors, and their contents are ever interchanging. While on the path to having a child, I underwent many invasive procedures, internal ultrasounds and medical examinations, multiple dilation and cutterages, culminating in a c-section when my living daughter was born. The trauma of having my children leave my body in rushes of blood, pain, and depression seemed an unstoppable exodus. As my babies spilled out of me, so too did my identity: I was a mother, but I had empty arms. The medical procedures amplified this disconnectedness - cold strangers coming into the body, dissecting, probing and dissolving what I had perceived to be the borders of both my physical and emotional self. Even during the c-section which resulted in a healthy child, I nonetheless felt violated as the doctors pried me open while strapped to a table, paralyzed and helpless, and wrenched my daughter from me. I was left alone in a recovery room, loosely pieced back together, full of holes and tears, the world passing through me.

The process of collage for me is like surgery, taking (cutting) apart the body and piecing it back together, but never resulting in something whole or contained. I combine soft, unsupported acrylic paint with harsher, more industrial man made elements, like medical invasions into the natural female body as well as its own biological processes when making, bearing, and losing children. The acrylic that eventually behaves like flesh is manipulated into overtly female forms, and yet comes into being through a traditionally masculine Abstract Expressionistic process, the pouring of paint, which incorporates the emotive power of colour and intuitive drawing. These marks morph into elements of ornamentation created from materials such as wood veneer, most often used in furniture, and pattern evoking wall coverings, fabric and architecture. These often serve as the structure, symbolizing both the female environment of domestic interiors, as well as evoking the idea of preciousness, treasure, love and longing, for things lost and gained. I exploit the human tendency to ornament objects which we

hold dear: like secret treasures in decorative boxes, women both lament and rejoice their empty or occupied filigree wombs. I often use fabric to act as tendons holding bits of tissue together, yet evoking the surface of the body, the identity of the woman as she projects it through her dress and self presentation. These exterior references become internalized as part of the body and self, as do our external projections through adornment.

Using painting and collage to create actual emotive space, I am attempting to express the intertwining of the female self and the female essence, and their potentially destructive changeability through the invasion of environment and experience. Yet the protean self attempts to imbue the positive and use new priorities. The re-assemblage begins, even while scar tissue, both literal and figurative, remains.

This exhibition is dedicated to the employees of the Lois Hole Hospital for Women, and the extraordinary women of the Reproductive Mental Health Unit.

The Women's Hospital cares for and supports thousands of women every year dealing with Women's Health issues. This is a wonderful place to have a baby born, and is the place to be if things take an unwelcome turn. The Reproductive Mental Health Team is an invaluable resource, one that women can turn to for many reasons, from postpartum depression to coping with the loss of an infant or pregnancy. These caregivers have saved many lives from being consumed or ended by depression and grief, including my own. They provide a sanctuary of acceptance and support, for many women, the only refuge they have.

The women of the Perinatal Loss Program are pioneering efforts to change the public's perception and awareness of infant and pregnancy loss. The way our culture reacts to the families left behind is often insensitive and uneducated. In Psychology and Health, Cathy Maker and Jane Ogden speak of how their research found that the turmoil and healing process felt by mothers when a pregnancy is lost mirrors the experience after the loss of a loved one.¹ The experience and pain is different for everyone, and nobody outside of that individual experience is equipped or qualified to judge how much grief or healing is required. Others often try to allot an appropriate amount of grieving time, usually arbitrarily chosen in relation to the age or term of the baby lost, or if they have any living children. This is a mistake that can make the loss much harder to bear, and parents are often made to feel that society doesn't want them, or their grief. "The length of pregnancy has nothing to do with the degree of attachment," says Patti Walker, RN, BN and Regional Bereavement Co-Ordinator for the Lois Hole Hospital for Women. Nor does the healthy life of an older child negate the pain felt by the parents with any subsequent pregnancy losses. For the parents, it isn't about measuring the degree of pain or loss, it is about remembering and mourning love and life, however short.

With counseling and support, parents can in time learn to carry the memory of their babies, but they need that loss to be respected. Most parents are not hoping for sympathy or special treatment, and are simply desperate for an understanding that precious children who deserved a chance at life are gone. They need the chance to mourn and say good bye, in the same way as anybody trying to cope with the loss of a loved one, to start the healing process. This right is often denied, and that can make it even harder for the parents to let go of both the baby and the potential of the life lost. However, thanks to programs such as those at the Lois Hole Hospital For Women, the resources for grieving parents have greatly improved. Annual memorials are organized so that families can have a safe setting in which to say goodbye, and meet others coping with the same kind of issues. The Walk to Remember, held every fall, is again a chance for families to band together and remember their babies, and remind the public that the lives lost need to be acknowledged.

If you or someone you know has lost a baby and is in need of support, please refer to the information pamphlets below, which offer contacts to resources that can help.

¹ Maker, Cathy and Jane Ogden. "The Miscarriage Experience: More Than Just a Trigger to Psychological Morbidity" Psychology and Health, June 2003, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp.403-415.





Emma McLay DVD Image List

File Name: mclay.01

Title: Costae Fluitantes

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, wire, copper nails, rosewood

Dimensions: 54" x 133" x 7"

File Name: mclay.02

Title: Costae Fluitantes

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, wire, copper nails, rosewood

Dimensions: 54" x 133" x 7"

File Name: mclay.03

Title: Costae Fluitantes

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, wire, copper nails, rosewood

Dimensions: 54" x 133" x 7"

File Name: mclay.04

Title: Costae Fluitantes

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, wire, copper nails, rosewood

Dimensions: 54" x 133" x 7"

File Name: mclay.05

Title: Costae Fluitantes

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, wire, copper nails, rosewood

Dimensions: 54" x 133" x 7"

File Name: mclay.06

Title: Calida Atra Angulis

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, copper, teak wood, found object, and wire on canvas

Dimensions: 70" x 70" x 10"

File Name: mclay.07

Title: Calida Atra Angulis

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, copper, teak wood, found object, and wire on canvas

Dimensions: 70" x 70" x 10"

File Name: mclay.08

Title: Calida Atra Angulis

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, copper, teak wood, found object, and wire on canvas

Dimensions: 70" x 70" x 10"

File Name: mclay.09

Title: Calida Atra Angulis

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, copper, teak wood, found object, and wire on canvas

Dimensions: 70" x 70" x 10"

File Name: mclay.10

Title: Lex Caesarea

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, mica, walnut wood, lead pewter, imitation silver leaf, sand, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 66" x 55" x 17"

File Name: mclay.11

Title: Lex Caesarea

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, mica, walnut wood, lead pewter, imitation silver leaf, sand, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 66" x 55" x 17"

File Name: mclay.12

Title: Lex Caesarea

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, mica, walnut wood, lead pewter, imitation silver leaf, sand, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 66" x 55" x 17"

File Name: mclay.13

Title: Lex Caesarea

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, mica, walnut wood, lead pewter, imitation silver leaf, sand, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 66" x 55" x 17"

File Name: mclay.14

Title: Lex Caesarea

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, mica, walnut wood, lead pewter, imitation silver leaf, sand, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 66" x 55" x 17"

File Name: mclay.15

Title: Lex Caesarea

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, mica, walnut wood, lead pewter, imitation silver leaf, sand, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 66" x 55" x 17"

File Name: mclay.16

Title: Hysterosalpingogram

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment , walnut wood, cherry wood, copper, lead pewter, wire, glass and fabric

Dimensions: 70" x 122" x 13"

File Name: mclay.17

Title: Hysterosalpingogram

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment , walnut wood, cherry wood, copper, lead pewter, wire, glass and fabric

Dimensions: 70" x 122" x 13"

File Name: mclay.18

Title: Hysterosalpingogram

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment , walnut wood, cherry wood, copper, lead pewter, wire, glass and fabric

Dimensions: 70" x 122" x 13"

File Name: mclay.19

Title: Hysterosalpingogram

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment , walnut wood, cherry wood, copper, lead pewter, wire, glass and fabric

Dimensions: 70" x 122" x 13"

File Name: mclay.20

Title: Hysterosalpingogram

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment , walnut wood, cherry wood, copper, lead pewter, wire, glass and fabric

Dimensions: 70" x 122" x 13"

File Name: mclay.21

Title: Hysterosalpingogram

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment , walnut wood, cherry wood, copper, lead pewter, wire, glass and fabric

Dimensions: 70" x 122" x 13"

File Name: mclay.22

Title: Fibrin

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic and fabric

Dimensions: 102" x 68" x 83"

File Name: mclay.23

Title: Fibrin

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic and fabric

Dimensions: 102" x 68" x 83"

File Name: mclay.24

Title: Fibrin

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic and fabric

Dimensions: 102" x 68" x 83"

File Name: mclay.25

Title: Fibrin

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic and fabric

Dimensions: 102" x 68" x 83"

File Name: mclay.26

Title: Fibrin

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic and fabric

Dimensions: 102" x 68" x 83"

File Name: mclay.27

Title: Myometrial Vascularity

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, micro beads, cherry wood, imitation gold leaf, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 65" x 30" x 14"

File Name: mclay.28

Title: Myometrial Vascularity

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, micro beads, cherry wood, imitation gold leaf, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 65" x 30" x 14"

File Name: mclay.29

Title: Myometrial Vascularity

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, micro beads, cherry wood, imitation gold leaf, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 65" x 30" x 14"

File Name: mclay.30

Title: Myometrial Vascularity

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, micro beads, cherry wood, imitation gold leaf, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 65" x 30" x 14"

File Name: mclay.31

Title: Myometrial Vascularity

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, micro beads, cherry wood, imitation gold leaf, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 65" x 30" x 14"

File Name: mclay.32

Title: Myometrial Vascularity

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, micro beads, cherry wood, imitation gold leaf, fabric and wire

Dimensions: 65" x 30" x 14"

File Name: mclay.33

Title: Intravasation

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, graphite, aluminum, chicken wire, wire and fabric

Dimensions: 85" x 59" x 42"

File Name: mclay.34

Title: Intravasation

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, graphite, aluminum, chicken wire, wire and fabric

Dimensions: 85" x 59" x 42"

File Name: mclay.35

Title: Intravasation

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, graphite, aluminum, chicken wire, wire and fabric

Dimensions: 85" x 59" x 42"

File Name: mclay.36

Title: Intravasation

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, graphite, aluminum, chicken wire, wire and fabric

Dimensions: 85" x 59" x 42"

File Name: mclay.37

Title: Intravasation

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, graphite, aluminum, chicken wire, wire and fabric

Dimensions: 85" x 59" x 42"

File Name: mclay.38

Title: Intravasation

Date: 2010

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, graphite, aluminum, chicken wire, wire and fabric

Dimensions: 85" x 59" x 42"

File Name: mclay.39

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.40

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.41

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.42

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.43

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.44

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.45

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.46

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.47

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.48

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.49

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.50

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.51

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.52

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.53

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.54

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.55

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

Dimensions: 135" x 168" x 204"

File Name: mclay.56

Title: Asherman's Walls

Date: 2011

Materials: Acrylic, powder pigment, copper tubing and wire, vinyl tubing, and fabric

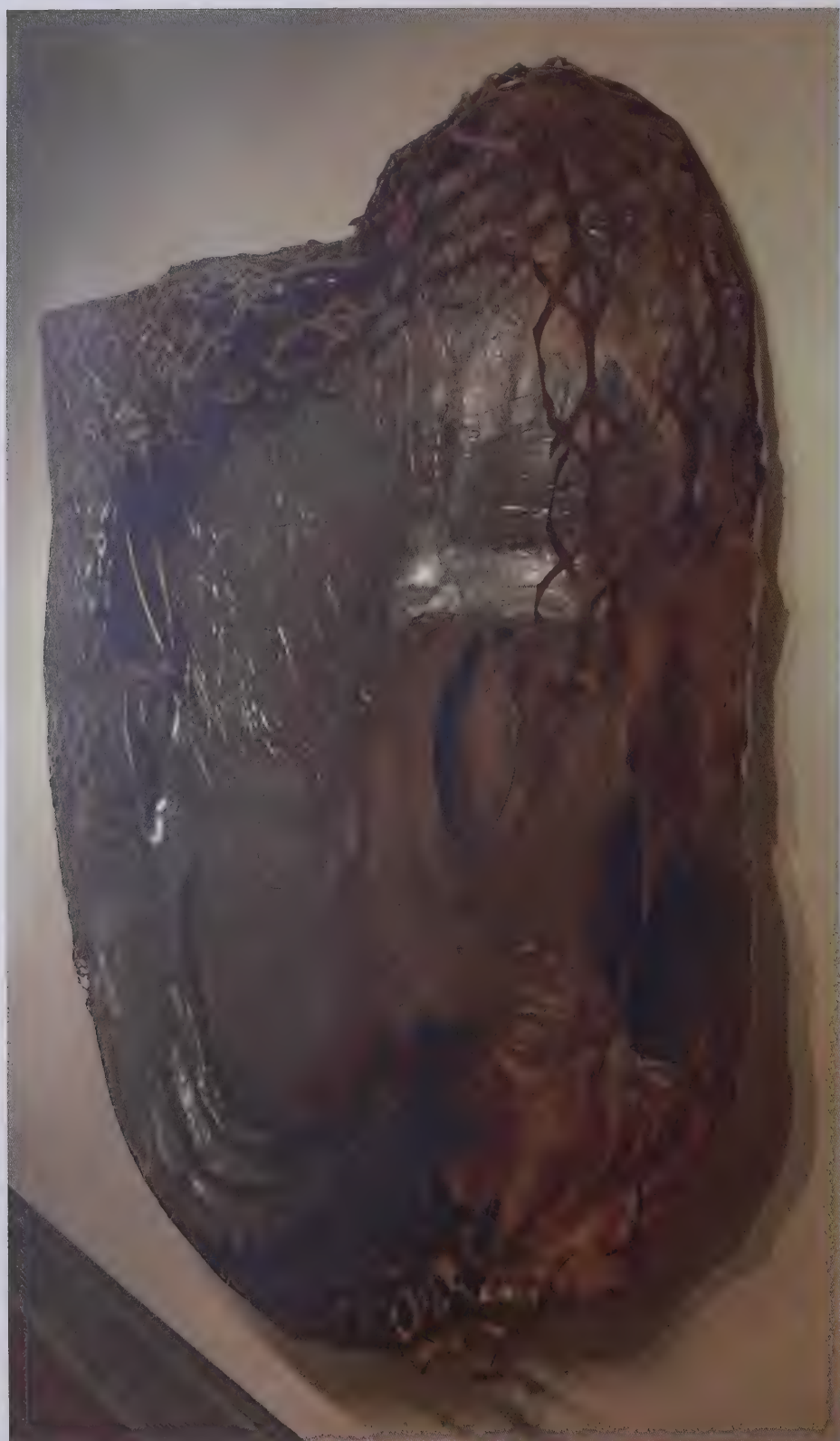
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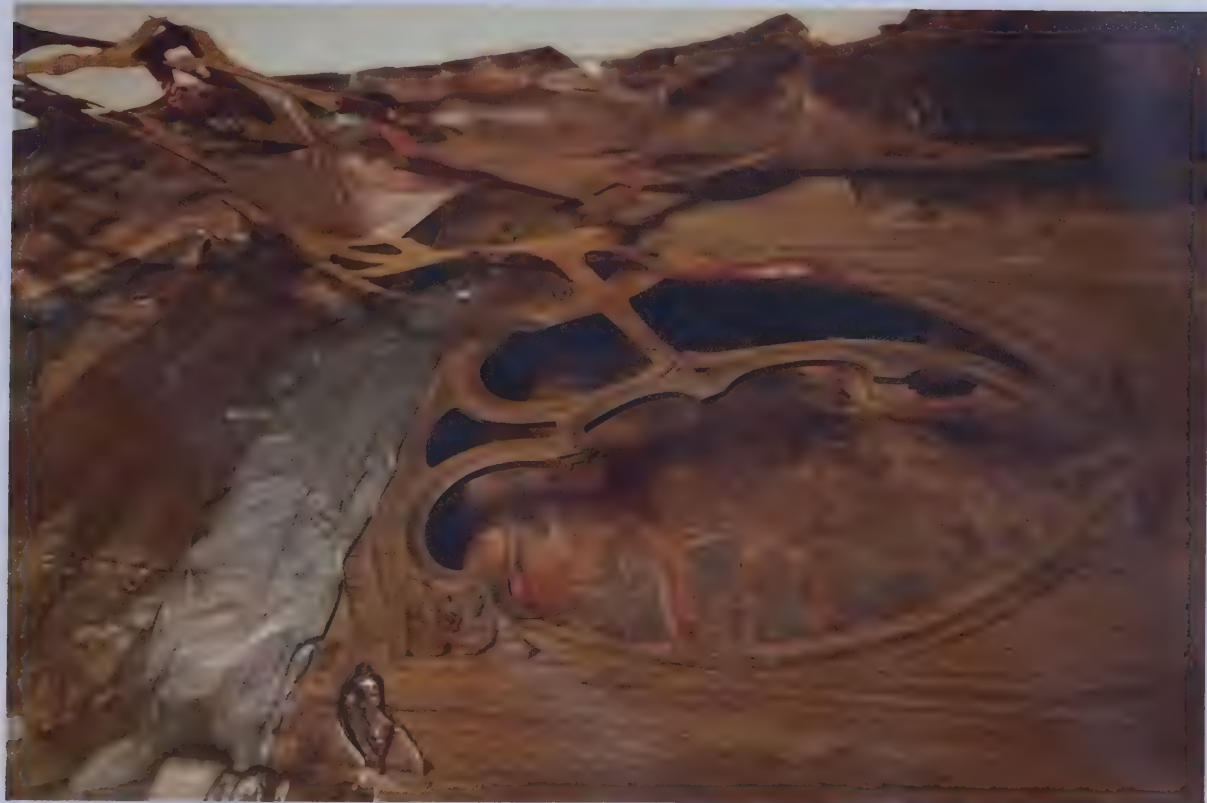












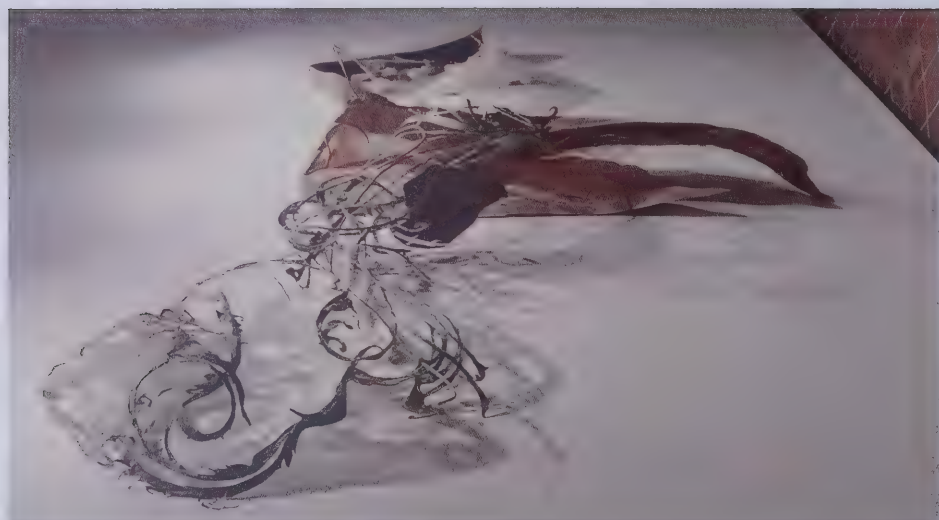




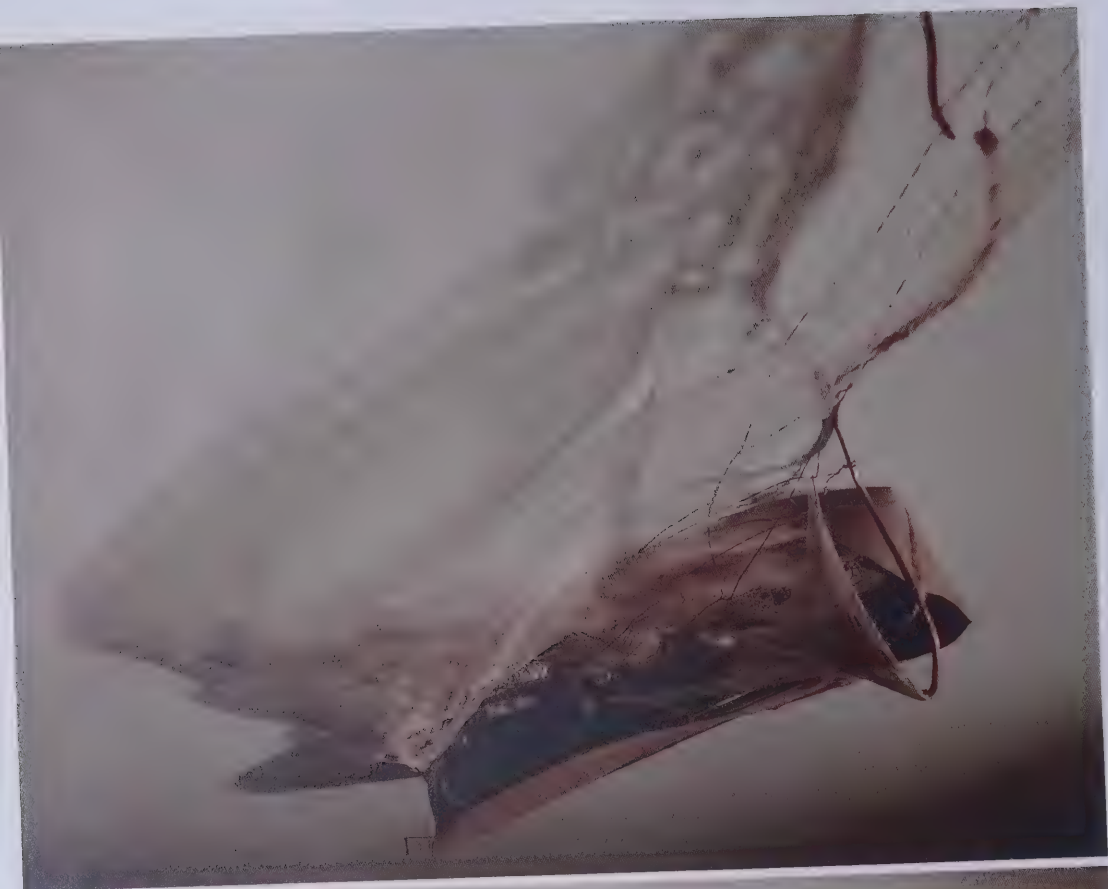


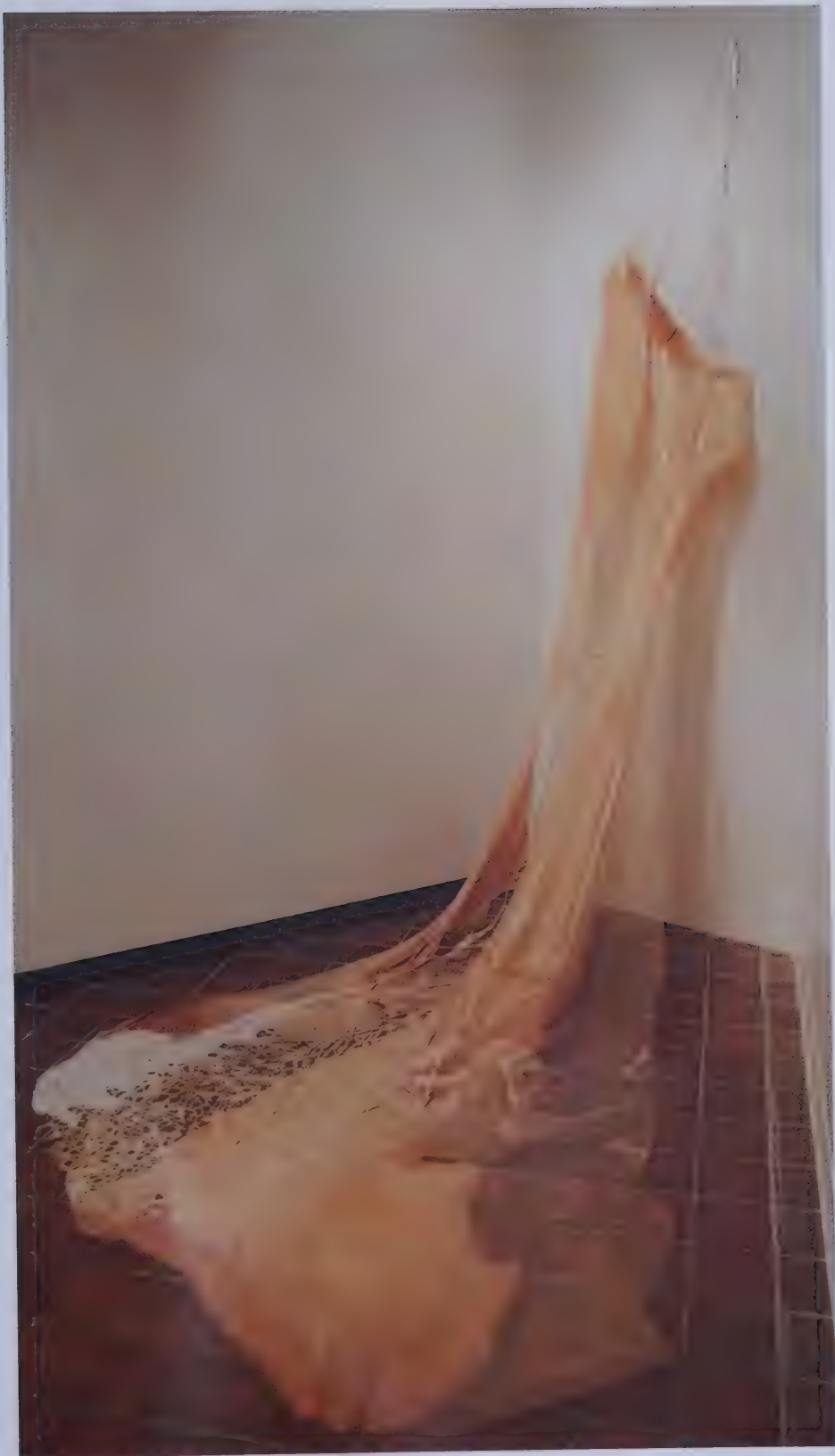




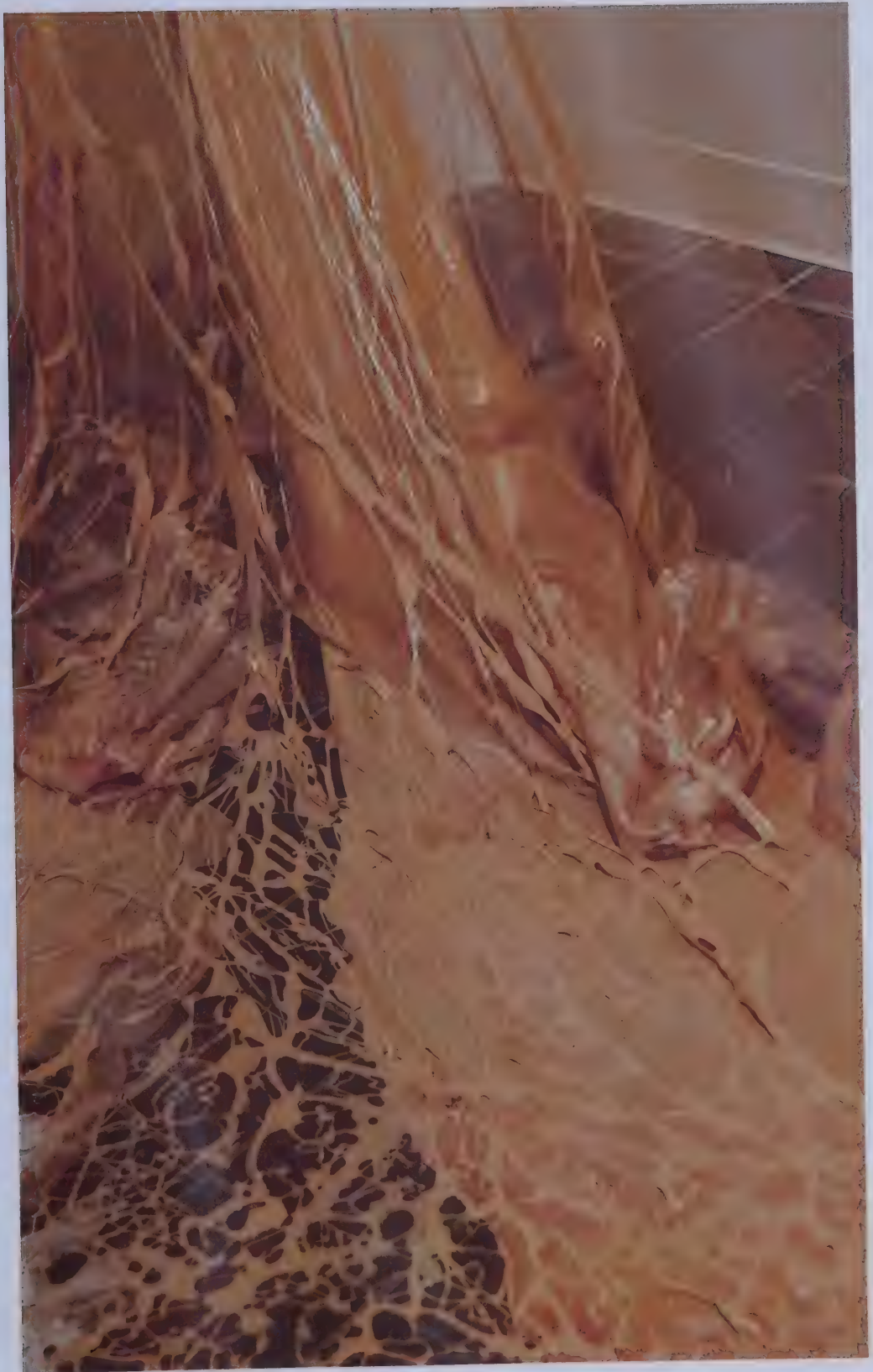
























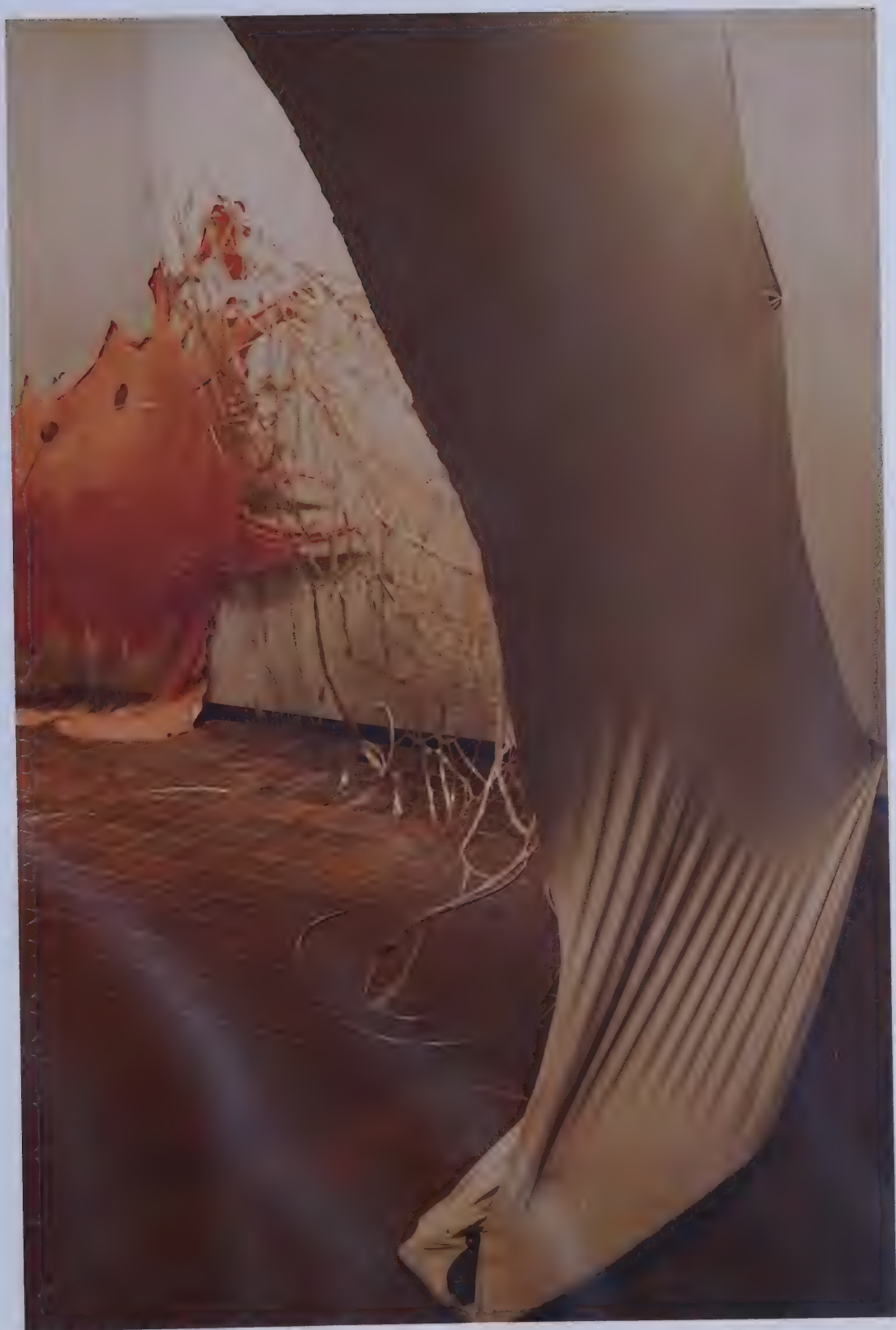
















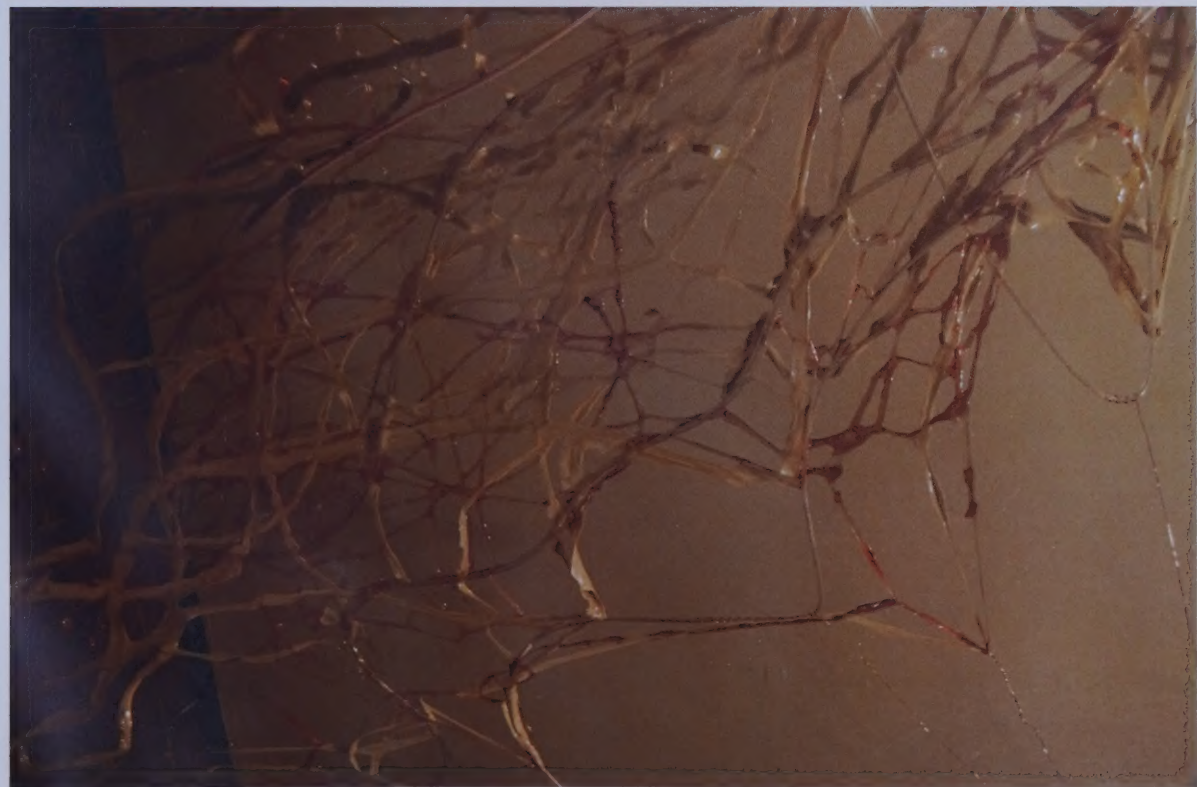














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